

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation: a History

Dr. Haruko Kataoka, the co-founder of the Suzuki Piano Method, began coming to North America in the early 1980's, invited by regional groups of Suzuki Piano teachers to conduct week-long teacher training workshops. Although always strongly supported by Dr. Suzuki, Dr. Kataoka's strict teaching was resisted by many teachers both in Japan and in North America. She was offered only a small minor rôle in SAA National Teachers Conferences that began in 1984 in Chicago, despite having co-founded the Suzuki Piano Method. Her teaching at SAA-sponsored workshops was labeled "Japan Pedagogy," while teachers were given SAA points toward becoming teacher trainers by accumulating workshops labeled Book 1, Book 2, etc. Dr. Kataoka felt this program implied that, once teachers had completed seven weeks of training at workshops, they were "finished" with their Suzuki training, while she believed that good Suzuki Method teachers needed to pursue a lifetime of research and study.

A number of teachers who believed that Dr. Kataoka's was the purist and most effective Suzuki Piano teaching, based on early videos of her students and upon hearing her trailblazing approach to piano pedagogy, lobbied the SAA to call Dr. Kataoka's workshops "Piano Basics" (instead of Japan Pedagogy that implied a teaching apart from the mainstream American training program), to give trainees credit for these, and to give her a more significant rôle in workshops and conferences. After much resistance by the SAA, a group of teachers, including Cleo Brimhall, Cheryl Kraft, Linda Nakagawa, and Karen Hagberg formed Piano Basics Inc. in 1993 in Salt Lake City. A newsletter for Piano Basics teachers was begun by Cleo Brimhall, and the corporation published the English translation of Dr. Kataoka's book *Sensibility and Education*.

Suzuki Piano Basics Inc. also began sponsoring international student/teacher exchanges with the 10-Piano Concerts in Japan and a 5-Piano Concert in Atlanta, Georgia. Subsequent international 10-Piano events, in addition to the ones in Matsumoto, happened in Sacramento, California bi-annually until 2016. Groups of Suzuki Piano Basics teachers around North America sponsored workshops conducted by Dr. Kataoka for as many as five weeks a year.

In 1996, Piano Basics was incorporated as the Piano Basics Foundation, and the newsletter transformed into the Piano Basics Foundation News, a bi-monthly publication that published English translations of Dr. Kataoka's articles and documented her teaching through her death in 2004. The publication and the Foundation, more recently named the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation, continued through 2023, continuously printing translations of Dr. Kataoka's articles, reporting on North American workshops that continued with Japanese teachers Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura, lifelong trainees of Dr. Kataoka, and documenting the 10-Piano Concerts in Sacramento and Matsumoto. Most recently, Karen Hagberg's *Matsumoto News*, sent to American teachers during her 3-year study in Japan 1989-1992, has been serialized here. Throughout its history, Suzuki Piano Basics teachers have reported on their experiences of having studied with Dr. Kataoka both in North America and in Japan in the six annual issues of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News.

Unfortunately, Dr. Haruko Kataoka, the co-founder of the Suzuki Piano Method, is not mentioned on the web sites of the Suzuki Association of the Americas (SAA) or the International Suzuki Association (ISA). The only source of information for her important legacy is through the 30+ years of work of the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation that is now being preserved here on the Internet Archive to be freely shared with teachers into the future. For this we may thank Dr. Kenneth Wilburn, the most dedicated Suzuki dad in the world, who began a web site for Suzuki Piano Basics at East Carolina University nearly three decades ago and who now continues to collect and digitize teaching videos in addition to converting his entire web site over to the Internet Archive. For this we may be eternally grateful.